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REFLECTIONS

Bertha and Millie Smith c 1899-1900
by Jeffrey Hunt
Photograph by Al. A. Simmons, early Oregon Photographer

This photograph captures two sisters: **Bertha Bright Smith** (my great-grandmother) and her younger sister **Millie Smith**, likely taken around 1899 or 1900. Bertha would have been about 21 years old—unmarried but not far from meeting her future husband, the Irishman John Toner. Millie, about 18 here, would later marry her first cousin, Ralph Carr, though they had no children.

The card bears a simple inscription on the back: *Bertha, Millie.* But look closely, and above that, faintly penciled at the top center, are the initials **L.N.S.**—likely for **Lewis Nolan Smith**, their eldest brother. Lewis never married and left no descendants. My guess is this particular print was intended for him. And since he had no family to pass things along to, it likely made its way to Bertha, and then to her daughter—my grandmother. That's how it ended up among the boxes of family photographs I now care for.

The card itself measures 4½ by 6⅝ inches, typical of the mounted prints of the era. I suspect this image once lived in the old family album—what I refer to as the *Wells Smith Album.* If not, it likely belongs there. A few photographs were removed—or "borrowed"—over the years. As I continue cataloging that album, I'll be watching closely to confirm whether this was one of them.

This scan has been carefully cleaned—dust removed, contrast gently boosted, and clarity enhanced—but I've also included the original, untouched version for comparison. Though retouched digitally, I consider this a continuation of traditional darkroom practice. These are the same decisions a photographer would have made with chemicals and light—only a century later.

One detail is particularly striking. Zoom in closely—closer than the naked eye can manage—and you'll see tiny black dots painted into Bertha's eyes. They aren't smudges or damage. They were intentionally added, likely by the photographer, to bring the eyes to life. I've seen this on other portraits from the 1890s—so small and precise they're nearly invisible, even when you know they're there. It must have required a steady hand and a fine brush.

A handwritten note on the back reads *Mystic, October 2004*. I'm not certain of its origin—possibly an early scan or digital reference done by me—but the current scan is the highest-quality version available and should replace any earlier versions that may exist.

This portrait is one of several from a family photo sitting. Their father, **John Smith**, had died a decade earlier in 1889, so he does not appear. The rest of the siblings do—each card carefully posed, with positive identifications waiting. Together, they paint a fuller picture of the family's quiet transition into the new century.

Bertha Bright Smith was born April 20, 1879, in Elkton, Umpqua County, Oregon. Her father, John, was 48; her mother, Esther, was 26. She married James Toner on November 9, 1902, in Roseburg, Oregon. They had nine children in sixteen years. She died November 15, 1958, in Eugene, Oregon, at the age of 79.

Millie Christina Smith was born August 28, 1882, also in Elkton, Umpqua County, **Oregon**. Her father was 51, her mother 30. She had three brothers and six sisters. She died January 12, 1929, in Alaska, at the age of 46.

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4 N 5

Bertha
Millie

MYSTIC OCT 2004

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